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Our Path

TO

Freedom

AND

New Kashmir

ALL QUOTATIONS

unaknowledged, and in bold type, are taken from the introduction to "New Kashmir",

by

SHEIKH MOHAMMED ABDULLAH

whose picture appears on the cover.

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" Our path in the past has been rough and stony, like the precipitous paths that wind up our mountains. The memory of our martyrs is still green. Every year their graves are covered with the flowers of the people, and every year in their presence we renew our pledge to achieve the freedom for which they died."

—SHEIKH MOHAMMED ABDULLAH

Shrika Library & Reading Room,
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Bhartiya Mandir, Rehari.

"THE FIGHT IS NO NEW ONE FOR US it has got its own heritage of the past, and it has its own vision of the future.....It is for the poor against those who exploit them; for the toiling people of our beautiful homeland against the heartless ranks of the socially privileged."

"And the problems we have faced, and still face, are no small ones. The State of Jammu and Kashmir is the biggest in India, covering 84,471 square miles of mountains and valleys, lakes and lowlands. It is a Frontier state of no mere local importance. Its boundaries touch British India, Republican China, Buddhist Tibet, and Soviet Russia.

"Between the snow-adorned barrier ranges of the Himalayas, and the earth-coloured and sun-scorched plains of the Punjab, live our people, forty *lacs* of them, in Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh and the Frontier Regions, in the Poonch and the Chinani Ilaqas. Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians, Kashmiri Pandits, Jains and Harijans inhabit the summer and winter capitals of Srinagar and Jammu, thirty-nine towns and nearly nine thousand villages.

"Ninety-six out of every hundred of our people draw sustenance from the land, and live in far-flung and isolated villages. oppressed by want and harried by disease. Their average yearly income barely reaches Rs. 11/- per head.

"Therefore it has always been the goal of the National Conference to fight the immemorial poverty of the peasant and the artisan, and the unmitigated helplessness of the worker."

"Throughout the lean centuries of history, the

poor and exploited sons of Kashmir have been the palanquin bearers of Hindu monarchs and Buddhist rulers and Moghul emperors."

"The peasant sons of the valley and the mountains have scratched only nine inches of top soil and eked out a bare existence. Now the time has come when they must dig deep into the bowels of the earth, and yoke the technique of modern science to the task of getting for themselves a bigger and better morsel of daily bread"

THE BACKGROUND.

"BORN IN 1932 AS THE MUSLIM CONFERENCE it immediately became the spearhead of the masses of Kashmir, more than three quarters of whom are Muslims. It was during this period that the whole of India was shaken into new awakening following the Civil Disobedience movement of 1931, and it had its own psychological influence on us. The Conference, though Muslim in name and spontaneously formed as an expression of the deep-noted sufferings of the people, was in spirit national and was concerned with the welfare of all communities. That spirit is illustrated by what I said in 1935, in my appeal to men of all communities:

"My fight is for the emancipation of my country. Let us all rise above petty communal bickerings, and work jointly for the welfare of the masses. I appeal to my Hindu bretheren not to entertain imaginary fears and doubts. Let us assure them that their rights will not be jeopardised if they join hands with the Muslims."

"Our movement was dynamic, and as the years went on rooted itself more deeply into the soil of the State."

OUR AUGUST RESOLUTION.

This resolution was passed in over 500 meetings all over the State on Responsible Government Day, August 5th, 1938.

"This mass meeting of the people places on record its complete repudiation of the present system of irresponsible Government, and wishes to express its faith in the establishment of complete responsible government which alone can cure the ills of the people. Therefore this gathering appeals to all patriotic persons to muster under the banner of freedom and to be prepared for the coming struggle for liberty. The victory of that struggle alone would usher in a period of complete political, economic and social emancipation."

ON AUGUST 28th 1938.

Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, Sardar Budh Singh, Ghulam Mohammed Sadiq, Maulana Mohammed Sayeed and Pandit Kashyapbandhu were arrested by the Kashmir Government.

Thus in common suffering for freedom the different communities sealed their unity.

THE "GOONDAS"!

Kashmir Government Communiques

No. 69. 31st August, 1938.

"The *goondas* in the city who apparently are responsible for drilling the boys for the procession are being rounded up.....

Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah and six others arrested with him have been tried and sentenced."

No. 70. 1st September, 1938.

"At Anantnag, three persons have been arrested including Mohammed Afzal Beg."

No. 75. 4th September, 1938.

"The police are rounding up *goondas*, and forty-seven arrests have been made in the city, and thirty-one in the districts."

The distinguished "goondas" who were arrested included M. L. A's, lawyers, Municipal Commissioners, Journalists, doctors and leading businessmen and students. *They belonged to all Communities.*

MR MOHAMMED AFZAL BEG, "EX-GOONDA" IS NOW THE HON. MINISTER FOR PUBLIC WORKS, AND THE FIRST POPULAR MINISTER TO BE SENT BY THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE INTO THE KASHMIR GOVERNMENT (1944).

THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE EMERGES.

"It was only in the logic of things therefore that in 1939 we formally converted the organisation into the all Jammu and Kashmir National Conference"

In June 1938, the Working Committee of the Muslim Conference had recommended to the General Body that the time had come for mustering all progressive elements, standing for the achievement of responsible government, under a common flag, and that steps be taken by constitutional amendments to change the name of the organisation so that all people who are desirous of participating in the political struggle may be able to join the Conference without distinction of caste, colour, creed and race.

Thus a special session was convened on the 10th and 11th June, 1939, under the presidentship of Khwaja Ghulam Mohammed Sadiq, to get this resolution ratified by the mass of the Conference members. The President said :

> "This day will be written in bold letters in the history of the national awakening of Jammu and Kashmir. The decision which you are going to take today is not being watched only by the Kashmir Government but by the whole of India."

Far-seeing thoughts were expressed by the Chairman of the Reception Committee, Maulana Mohammed Sayeed :

"*With high courage you have traversed long distances with only one motive—that the chains of slavery, which have made the people of heavenly Kashmir the dwellers of virtual hell, may be cut...truly enough you have come to lay the foundation of New Kashmir*".

"Since then we have weathered many storms and passed through many battles, and the Conference has grown from strength to strength, by virtue of its democratic ideal and its ever-expanding mass following."

"These last few years, when the world has been tormented by war and the invader stood at the doors of India itself, the National Conference realised the supreme needs of the defence of the State, and that the problem of Kashmir was surrounded by the wider concentric circles of the problem of India and the problem of the world as a whole. Therefore as patriots our task was to save our people from hunger at home and add our strength to the anti-Fascist struggle of the people of India and the world."

THE FIGHT FOR FOOD

The Working Committee of the National Conference in its meeting held in Jammu on the 14th, 15th, and 16th, January, 1942, under the presidentship of Sardar Budh Singh, the revered and veteran nationalist fighter, noted with deep concern the aggravating war situation, accompanied by the deepening food crisis in Kashmir, and demanded from the Government a closer association of popular democratic elements in ensuring equitable, efficient and incorruptible food distribution. It also sounded a note of serious warning to the Government to beware of the impending danger of the Japanese invasion which was fast approaching the borders of India.

It was in the following months of fateful 1942 that peasants walked from the villages into the streets of Srinagar carrying the bodies of their fellows who had died of hunger. In the mountains and in isolated villages, in townlets and even in the capital cities, the shadow of approaching famine stalked among the homes of the people. It was against this background of suffering and slow starvation that, in Mujahid Manzil, the headquarters of the National Conference, a

FOOD CONFERENCE

was called on the 10th of May, 1942. Delegates from the

seven *tehsils* of the valley and the city of Srinagar participated. They decided that the scarcity of food and fuel was not solely due to shortage, but the responsibility for it lay partly on the inefficiency of a corrupt administration, and partly on the *jagirdars*, hoarders, profiteers and black-marketers who were taking full advantage of the chaos ensuing. Panic was increasing due to the grave war news. All this constituted a serious menace to the very existence of the people.

Among other things, this Conference demanded from the Government the acquisition of grain stocks from *jagirdars* and merchants, the purchase by the State of standing crops, the introduction of rationing and control, the opening of State depots, the rigid regulation and control of fuel storage and distribution.

The resolution of the Conference, in demanding immediate action, ended on the following note:

"At the present juncture, when the National Conference is preparing the people of the State to face the world forces of Fascism and reaction, the responsibilities of the Government have increased, and in the discharge of its increased responsibilities, the Government should spare no steps to ameliorate the troubles of the people. In our country, night and day, thousands of labourers are busy on war work. To keep these workers care-free and to strengthen the anti-Fascist front among the people, it is essential that the problem of the people's hunger be immediately solved."

At last the Government moved, and certain suggestions were adopted, but inefficiency and corruption remained rampant.

To combat this, the co-operation of the National Conference was finally sought, and in the words of Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, "Towards that end, we mobilised the entire organisational strength of the National Conference, and took our full share of the distribution of foodstuffs and fuel through People's Food Committees. Thus it was the National Conference which stood between starvation and the people, and rescued them from scarcity and want, in spite of bureaucratic interference and inefficiency."

AGAINST FASCISM.

In a typical Kashmiri setting, on a dunga boat floating on the smooth waters of the Dal lake, the Working Committee held a meeting on the 16th, 17th and 18th of May, 1942. After a discussion lasting over twenty-two hours, it issued the following statement to the Press, relating to the national and the international situation:

The Working Committee after reviewing the international situation in all its aspects and taking particular note of the Indian situation which is worsening due to the Japanese advance towards its frontiers and the recent bombing of certain cities and towns, is of the opinion that at this juncture of world history it is high time that the people should realize the significance of the increasing danger to our country from the world fascist forces. People must be roused from their apathetic attitude towards this war, which in the opinion of the Working Committee is no more a purely imperialistic conflict but has changed into a people's front of the entire world against Fascism and reaction, no matter whether that reaction is of home—made variety or of a foreign brand. In order to strengthen this front, close co-operation of the Governments and the peoples is very essential and unless such co-operation between the two is forthcoming, anti-fascist forces in the country will find it an uphill task to create that enthusiasm and fervour in the country which is necessary for the successsful prosecution of this war. The Working Committee regrets deeply the present attitude of the British War Cabinet towards the problems of the British India. The recent hesitant step taken by the British Government in the shape of the Cripps Scheme in which the downtrodden millions of people living in the Indian States were entirely left out of the picture, lends support to the Indian States' peoples' apprehensions that the British Government does not mean business. The very fact that refuge was and is being taken under the very absurd argument of treaties which subsist between the British Crown and some of the Indian Princes makes it

amply clear that the British Government is not prepared to recognize the rights and even the very existence of the States' peoples. Such policy instead of solving the problem has only complicated it. But in spite of all this, the Working Committee is definitely of the opinion that to adopt a policy of wait and see will proved disastrous and to ignore the main enemy of the democratic peoples, world-fascism, will only serve to enslave them completely. History has isolated our main enemy. It must be kept under the continued fire of a united anti-fascist front. The difficulties created by the present short-sighted policy of British Bureaucracy in conjunction with their feudal allies—the Indian Princes—in the way of creating a united front against world fascism and reaction should no more blind us to the realities of the situation. Immediate steps should, therefore, be taken to arouse the people from their slumber and to change their present complacent indifference towards this war to an active participation in it. All impediments in the way of such a democratic movement of the peoples should be effectively removed and the war effort should be made as popular as it is in U. S. S. R., China and other allied countries.

With these objectives in view and in order to create in the fullest sense of the word the real and popular front against the anti-democratic and reactionary forces of the world, the National Conference Working Committee in the past had made certain practical suggestions to the Kashmir Government. It is however to be regretted that these suggestions were not acted upon. Notwithstanding this deplorable fact, the National Conference as a responsible mass organization does not propose to shirk the duty that it is expected to perform at this grave hour. People must go on with the programmes set for them by the National Conference and should in no way be daunted by what the Jammu and Kashmir Government does or does not do. The Working Committee desires to lay special emphasis on the fact that to make a common cause with all the progressive nations of the world is the prime necessity of the hour. The defeat of fascism and reaction on the international front alone will ensure its defeat at home.

The Working Committee strongly deprecates the repressive policy pursued by the Kashmir Government against the public workers of the State especially when such a policy is indirectly weakening the popular front against the fascist aggression. In the light of this changed situation what the National Conference advises the Government to do at this juncture is to remove all impediments from the way of an effective and total mobilization of the peoples' forces. One of these is the urge of hunger, which under the present inefficient and unscientific method of collection and distribution of food grains, is taking a devastating shape. The Government must take immediate and effective steps to ease the situation and adopt all those means and act upon all those suggestions which the Conference has from time to time proposed in this behalf. To ensure successful defence of the country all people must be armed and in order to do that the Government must repeal the Arms Act which has made most absurd and invidious distinctions between the various classes of people living in the State. Time has come when the Government should not be blinded by any wrong notions of prestige. They should make an earnest and honest effort to put into practice His Highness' noble sentiments expressed in his recent statement and afford opportunities to the people of the State "to feel themselves equals of nations anywhere in the world". In the opinion of the Working Committee granting of full responsible Government to the people of the State alone will secure them, in the words of His Highness, "Freedom from crippling restrictions and strangling control". This policy can make joint effort possible in successfully combating the Fascist forces, which are threatening our very existence.

In view of the situation discussed above, the Working Committee calls upon the Conference rank and file and all other progressive elements in the country to muster strong under the anti-fascist banner of the National Conference, to join the Mohalla and Village Committees in large numbers and do everything that the Conference may from time to time ask them to do in order to work for the final defeat of world fascism.

BACK TO THE LEGISLATURE.

Consequent on the assumption of responsibilities in the distribution of food and fuel in the State, and the continuance of the obstructionist attitude of many of the State officials, and also in view of the new organisational problems envisaged by the Defence resolution, the Working Committee deemed it expedient to revise its attitude to the protest boycott of Legislative activity. In its meeting of 31st May, 1942, it authorised the President to permit the participation of the resigned National Conference members of the Legislative Assembly as soon as the situation demanded it.

It was this timely step which enabled the National Conference to throw the weight of its influence into Praja Sabha politics, and eventually to take advantage of the Government's willingness to make a more democratic approach to the problems of the State, through the appointment of popular ministers.

FATEFUL AUGUST.

August 1942, which brought the arrest of the much-loved leaders of the Indian National Congress, and the consequent turmoil, sent dark shadows of the blood-stained plains across the Kashmir horizon.

On receiving the news of the arrests, immediate *hartal* followed in the city of Srinagar, and a great mass meeting of over fifty thousand people was addressed by Sher-i-Kashmir on that same evening.

While declaring the demand of the Indian people for independence to be their immediate birthright, and stressing the fundamental and consistent anti-fascist attitude and policy of the Indian National Congress, he exposed and condemned the provocative action of British Imperialism in arresting the leaders. He exhorted the Kashmir people to face the storm calmly, to remain unprovoked, and to hold fast to the policies of the National Conference which were guiding their struggle for freedom.

Thus the master-mind of the Kashmir People's movement guided the thoughts and actions of his countrymen in this grave hour of crisis, and brought them unscathed through the threatened storm.

The lead given by Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah was followed by the Working Committee in their resolution of 16th August, 1942; in which they said :

"The Working Committee of the all Jammu and Kashmir National Conference has considered the resolution of the Indian National Congress in which the Congress Working Committee and the A. I. C. C. have demanded immediate independence. It has also considered the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and other Congress leaders and the events following.

The Working Committee of the National Conference, after full deliberation, is of the opinion that India's independence is a right which no justice-loving man can deny and the British Government itself has promised to give it practical shape at the end of the war. Therefore the Working Committee considers the demand of the Congress that the independence of India be immediately declared as based on just reasons. Its basic purpose, as enunciated by Gandhiji, Maulana Azad, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, and other Congress leaders, time and again, and as clearly stated in the Congress resolution itself, is the defence of India, and to make the Allied war effort more effective and successful. It is a fact beyond doubt that, as soon as this demand is given a practical shape and Free India is admitted to the ranks of the Allies on a footing of equality, the entire mental and material resources of the forty crores of Indians would be rallied round one centre, and would render the Allied front impregnable. Thus the defeat of the Fascist powers would become a certainty. It is that viewpoint the enunciation of which has been done by the National Conference time and again, and once again it reiterates the same stand.

It is the decided opinion of the Working Committee that, if the Indian Government had not precipitated matters by arresting the leaders of the Indian National Congress on the 9th of August, the chance did exist of the situation improving. The Congress would have sent its adopted resolution and demand to the British Government, and the Governments of the Allied countries, and watched their reactions. Mahatma Gandhiji himself had also decided to meet the Viceroy and explain the demand and its object. It is obvious that, if the arrests had not begun, then the chances of a *via media* were bright, following which the clash between the Congress and the Government would have been averted. But the unstatesmanlike and precipitate policy of the Government made the situation worse.

The Working Committee condemns the reign of terror

and repression which the Government of India have launched by declaring the Indian National Congress illegal, by the arrest of the leaders, and by shooting down unarmed people. The Working Committee offers its heartfelt sympathy to the people who have become the victims of repression.

The Working Committee deeply regrets the reality that the steps taken by the Government of India have broadened the gulf of distrust and hatred between itself and public opinion in India, and the supporters of the democratic war front and, under these conditions, India, the British Government, its allies, and the world democratic front are suffering a serious loss. Only Japan and its Fascist allies can benefit by the new situation, and the turmoil in India. Therefore, to end this turmoil and conflict, and to strive towards that end, is the duty of every democratic-minded individual and organisation."

Under these circumstances, the Working Committee of the National Conference emphatically demands of the British Government the immediate release of Gandhiji and other Congress leaders, and other prisoners, and the ending of the policy of repression, which by bringing the situation to the normal will create an atmosphere of peace and confidence in which the establishment of complete independence and National Government in India may be given a practical shape. Thus, India in its capacity as a free and powerful democracy may be able to participate in the people's war front and extirpate for all times the Fascist powers, successfully ridding the world of this evil."

This same resolution was adopted by the General Council in its session on 29th and 30th August, 1942.

PROTEST TO THE VICEROY.

Text of the letter sent by Sardar Budh Singh, President of the National Conference on September 1st, 1942 to H. E. the Viceroy, protesting against the arrest of the Congress leaders.

I think your Excellency is aware that the All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference is the only non-communal country-wide mass organization of the State with economic and political emancipation of people as its ideal.

Your Excellency may also be apprised of the National Conference attitude towards the present war, which in our opinion, is no more purely an imperialistic conflict but is a definite clash between the peoples' forces on the one side and the Fascist aggressors on the other. It is however, the firm belief of the National Conference that no amount of material resourcefulness and war effort can guarantee success to the democracies unless and until it has definite sanction of the Indian masses behind it—lending their support, of-course, out of their sheer moral conviction that fascist aggression jeopardises their own freedom. The earnest co-operation of the Indian masses is, therefore, the very life blood of war and every action estranging—not to speak antagonising—them will be suicidal. The catastrophic results of the state of affairs in which the people and the Government are diametrically opposite, each harbouring suspicions against the other, can better be imagined than said.

The events of 9th August and after, therefore, came as a profound shock to the National Conference. Arrests of the Congress leaders at this critical time and the policy of ruthless repression that followed, show, if it shows anything, the utter bankruptcy of the British statesmanship and political wisdom. At a time when all the resources of people and the Government should have been together to fight the onslaught of the accursed fascism, that the Government should have started quarreling with its

own people is a misfortune the disastrous consequences of which are too patent. I know of no country in the history of the world which took to the unfortunate and unwise path of fanning the flames of discontent amongst its own people at a time when ruthless enemy is at their very door.

After all what do the Indians want? They do not, by any means, want that British people should leave India bag and baggage or that the armies of Allied should quit India at this critical juncture. All that they want is an immediate declaration of India's independence, and a National Government to be set up at the centre fully competent to mobilise India's vast and rich resources for the successful termination of war. No fair-minded freedom-loving person can characterise this demand as unjust and improper. On the contrary there is large body of British and Indian public opinion, outside Congress, which has unequivocally endorsed this demand. Apart from the unbiased British journals and many Indian statesmen even the members of the Bengal Government have expressed themselves in most unmistakable terms against the present policy of the British Government. But all this, unfortunately, has not been able to wean the Government from the path of sowing the seeds of discontent which every well-wisher of England and India shudders to think as to what would be the result thereof.

But the National Conference has not yet lost all hope. It feels that it is the bounden duty of every patriot to bring his full weight to bear upon the authorities in British India to call a halt to the present policy before it is too late. The Working Committee of the National Conference accordingly, met at an emergent meeting on 16th August, 1942 and passed a comprehensive resolution on the Indian situation, endorsing the Congress demand for independence. A copy of the resolution is submitted herewith.

In response to the Working Committee's appeal, the 23rd of August was observed as a National Day throughout the State.

All business was stopped and mass meetings were held at which millions of people gave their unanimous support to the Working Committee resolution demanding:—

(a) Immediate release of Congress Leaders and workers.
(b) Withdrawal of all repressive measures now in force and restoration of normal and peaceful conditions.
(c) Declaration of India's independence.
(d) Establishment of Provisional National Government of the centre.

It was, let me add, emphasised at these mass meetings that only by immediately conceding these demands, free India, morally convinced of the righteousness of the cause, will line up with the Allies and pool her resources in men and material for the complete annihilation of the Fascist menace from the world.

As is pointed out in the resolution, the protracted delay in declaring India free, and following the policy of ruthless repression, far from helping India, Britain and Allies, is fraught with grave dangers of assisting the Fascist powers. Your Excellency can imagine how difficult it renders the task of those organizations which were earnestly working to bring about a mass conciousness that the present war is as much theirs as that of the Allies. How essential this mental attitude is for the successful prosecution of war and how difficult it is to advocate it under the present repressive policy of the Government cannot be exaggerated.

I may, therefore, with all the earnestness at my command solicit you, in the name of people of Kashmir, to at once call a halt to the present policy of the British Government, start negotiations with the Congress leaders and transfer to India what has become her due long since. By this action alone, you can, in the opinion of the National Conference, avert the impending catastrophe, otherwise awaiting India at her door.

May I hope Your Excellency will take action before it is too late?

ROYISM WON'T DO!

[*Statement issued by Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, the President, All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference on the 11th July, 1943 in connection with the resignation of Pt. Raghunath Vashnavi of Sopore.*]

"At the present juncture when the Indian national situation demands from every patriot to do his bit and bring about unity of all sections of Indians and secure the release of all Congress leaders and other patriots now behind the bars in order to achieve a National Government and an effective defence of the motherland, one of the National Conference Working Committee members, Pt. Raghunath Vashnavi, has been giving expression to certain tendencies which clearly showed that he was treading a dangerous path and was adopting the same attitude with regard to the Indian National Congress which the British bureaucracy is adopting towards it. In this respect he had been in communication with me and certain other members of the Working Committee. In all of his letters he has maintained his hostile attitude towards the Indian National Congress which in his own words "*.....switched on the mob fury inspired by ill-conceived confused and defeatist analysis of the corelation of international forces and thus abetting sabotage and violence on a country—wide scale*" etc. etc. It is obvious that such ideas cannot be entertained by any patriot worth the name. In fact what the Government of India has failed to prove against the Congress has been so very dogmatically stated by Pt. Vashnavi in the sentence above quoted. With all this, however, I asked Mr. Vashnavi to come to Srinagar to discuss things with me and other colleagues of the Working Committee and thus get his misunderstanding cleared. But this procedure did not suit him. Instead he went on condemning the National Congress, the Gandhi cult and surprisingly enough the All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference of which he was a Working Committee member and about whose policy he knew everything and was in fact a party in framing it.

Now when we were expecting him in the Working Committee I receive his letter of resignation . It contained the same tirade against the Gandhi cult and the Indian National Congress and the same wrong and confused thinking about the National Conference. It seems that Pt. Vashnavi has decided to play the same role in our national politics as Mr. Roy and others of his way of thinking are playing in India. He accuses the National Conference of having sympathy with the Congress and having a soft corner for religion which he in his latest letter defines as being a "trap—house for ignorance".

Under the above circumstances I regretfully accept his resignation from the National Conference."

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MILESTONES, 1943.

During the following period, no trace of hope appeared in the Indian sky. The darkest hours of the people were during the time of Mahatmaji's fast in the Agha Khan Palace in 1943. With his release the first streaks of light were visible.

In 1943, on the war fronts of the world, came the turn of the Fascist tide. The magnificent heroism of the Red Army had tipped the scales of victory.

In Kashmir, the democratic pressure of the people succeeded, and the Government thought it fit to appoint a Commission of Enquiry. To this Commission National Conference representatives were also called as members. In spite of the fact that the Commission was for the most part packed with vested interests and *jagirdars*, the Working Committee as an experiment authorised its members, Mr M. A. Beg and G. M. Sadiq, to attend and report developments to them.

The Commission had its value, in so far as it showed the willingness of the Government to enquire into the abuses which riddled State administration, but in its day-to-day working it proved unsatisfactory, and ultimately the National Conference called upon its members to resign early in 1944.

MOMENTOUS ANNUAL SESSION
1944

The momentous 1944 session of the National Conference was held in Mujahid Manzil in the heart of the city of Srinagar. From all corners of Jammu and Kashmir, from the remote Gurez Valley to the sun-scorched borders of the Punjab, delegates and visitors flocked in their thousands to hear the new message of the National Conference.

A new message indeed it was. The delegates to the Annual Session were presented with the new programme which had been adopted by the Working Committee.

In his Presidential address, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah made a stirring appeal for the unity of the Kashmir people under the banner of the National Conference, for only through unity could they achieve the "New Kashmir" which was their goal.

Applying the same realism and statesmanship to the broader problems of India, the President expressed the wish of every State subject for the unity of the Indian people, and the solution of their problems through mutual agreement. Thus alone could the defeat of Imperialism be compassed, and only on the basis of Free India could the true independence of Kashmir be achieved.

WHEN THE DELEGATES WERE ON THE POINT OF DISPERSAL CAME THE NEWS THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD DECIDED TO APPOINT TWO POPULAR MINISTERS.

THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE WORKING COMMITTEE MET, AND DECIDED TO SEND IN THEIR NOMINEE. WHILE REALISING THAT THIS MEANT LIMITED POWERS ONLY, THE CONCESSION WAS THE RESULT OF DEMOCRATIC PRESSURE AND SHOULD BE AVAILED OF.

A FEW DAYS LATER MR M. A. BEG WAS APPOINTED MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS IN THE KASHMIR GOVERNMENT. THIS POWER TO THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE IS ONLY WELCOME AS AN ADDED OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE THE PEOPLE.

INDIAN UNITY, INDEPENDENCE AND US.

"The All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference has always championed and supported the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity, and at all times we have held that the biggest obstacle in the way of India's freedom is the difference and distrust between the two great communities. Therefore, every attempt at unity we consider auspicious. From the core of our heart we want the unity of the Hindus and Mussulmans of India. To settle these details is the task of the Congress and the League. And the leaders of these organisations, Gandhiji and Mr Jinnah were the best persons for this. Our duty, along with that our countrymen, was to support the move for unity. We could not forget that the Gandhi-Jinnah agreement in practical shape would have meant Congress-League agreement. It would have brought the hour of India's independence nearer.

Moreover, the independence of India is the essential pre-requisite for the independence of the States' peoples. So long as the India outside the States' borders continues to be the arena for deadlock and depression, thaw will not release the ice-bound politics of the Indian States. Therefore, the all-Jammu and Kashmir National Conference has cherished the unity of the Indian people as its fondest hope and has considered supporting it to be the prime duty imposed by patriotism and love of freedom."

Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, Presidential Address, Annual Session 1944, Srinagar.

"NEW KASHMIR"

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"The Working Committee of the National Conference which always has its hand on the pulse of the people, feels that at this time when political and economic systems are in the melting pot and ideas of a New World Order are being debated, it too must formulate more concretely its own conception of the New Kashmir it strives to build."

"The National Conference envisages the future of New Kashmir in both political and economic terms. Towards that end we have drawn up a scheme which politically is based on the democratic principle of responsible government, with the elective principle applied from the Local Panchayat right up to the National Assembly. This is linked with the independence of the Judiciary, and the ultimate responsibility of the Executive to the people."

"In the economic sphere, we have gone on the principle that planned economy is of the essence of progress, and that without it there can be no raising of the standard of the masses of the State."

★

"In our New Kashmir we shall build again the men and women of our State who have been dwarfed by centuries of servitude, and create a people worthy of our Glorious Motherland."

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